WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A trial management system, comprising:

a storage section storing one or more functions to be a target of trial;

a trial instruction giving section for receiving a user's instruction on a trial period for said function;

a specifying section for specifying a function, a trial of which is started, according to an instruction received by said trial instruction giving section; and

a control section for setting a trial period for the function specified by said specifying section in accordance with the instruction received by said trial instruction giving section.

2.   The trial management system set forth in Claim 1, wherein said trial instruction giving section receives the user's instruction in the form of input of a trial key associated with each function.

3.   The trial management system set forth in Claim 2, wherein:

said trial key includes data of said function itself and trial-use limitations imposed thereon, and

when said trial key is inputted to said trial

instruction giving section, said control section sets a trial period for a function specified by the trial key received by said trial instruction giving section according to the trial-use limitations indicated by the trial key received by said trial instruction giving section.

4. The trial management system set forth in Claim 2, wherein said trial key includes a trial key in the form of a start trial button, and a trial key in the form of an electronic key which is a code to release a program subject to access-protect from the access-protect.

5. The trial management system set forth in Claim 1, wherein said control section judges whether or not said function specified in the instruction received by said trial instruction giving section is operational, and sets only those which are operational to be available in a trial mode.

6. The trial management system set forth in Claim 1, wherein said control section changes a trial period for said function.

7. The trial management system set forth in Claim 6,

wherein, when said control section detects expiration of the trial period for a function during execution of a job thereof, the trial period for the function being set according to the instruction received by said trial instruction giving section, then said control section postpones the expiration of the trial period for the function until time the job of the function is actually completed.

8. The trial management system set forth in Claim 6, wherein:

said trial instruction giving section receives the user's instruction in the form of a specified key associated with a trial period of each function, and

said control section sets the trial period of said function according to data of the trial period indicated by the specified key received by said trial instruction giving section.

9. The trial management system set forth in Claim 8, wherein said control section judges whether or not the specified key received by said trial instruction giving section indicates data which extends a trial period, and extends the trial period for the function specified by said trial instruction giving section when said specified

key indicates the data which extends the trial period.

10. The trial management system set forth in Claim 8, wherein said control section judges whether or not the specified key received by said trial instruction giving section indicates correct data, and when an incorrect specified key is inputted a predetermined number of times, said control section terminates the trial period for the function specified by said trial instruction giving section.

11. The trial management system set forth in Claim 8, wherein said control section judges whether or not the specified key is an authorized key which gives an instruction to terminate the trial period so as to proceed to a state of authorized use, and when the specified key received by said trial instruction giving section is the authorized key, said control section terminates the trial period for the function specified by said trial instruction giving section and proceeds to the state of authorized use.

12. The trial management system set forth in Claim 8, wherein said control section judges whether or not an environment which is essential to carrying out the

function received by said trial instruction giving section is completely available, and when the environment essential to carrying out the function received by said trial instruction giving section is not completely available, said control section terminates the trial period for the function specified by said trial instruction giving section.

13. The trial management system set forth in Claim 1, wherein said trial instruction giving section is an operation panel which is provided with a key group for receiving the user's instruction and a display section for displaying guidance information including a process status with respect to the user.

14. The trial management system set forth in Claim 13, wherein:

said storage section stores a plurality of functions to be the target of trial, and

said display section displays a list of some of said plurality of functions which are confirmed as available.

15. The trial management system set forth in Claim 14, wherein said display section displays a list of trial periods for the respective functions together with the

list of some of said plurality of functions available.

16. The trial management system set forth in Claim 1, further comprising a communications board for sending inputted image information to an external device which is a transmission destination, under the control of said specifying section.

17. The trial management system set forth in Claim 1, further comprising a scanner for scanning a desired document image as image information, under the control of said specifying section.

18. The trial management system set forth in Claim 1, further comprising an image processing unit for performing predetermined image processing with respect to inputted image information, under the control of said specifying section.

19. The trial management system set forth in Claim 1, further comprising a storage device for temporarily storing image information, under the control of said specifying section.

20. The trial management system set forth in Claim 1,

further comprising a printer for printing out inputted image information.

21. The trial management system set forth in Claim 1, further comprising a net work scanner function as one of the functions to be the target of trial, whereby image data scanned by a device is transferred to another.

22. The trial management system set forth in Claim 1, further comprising an e-mail function as one of the functions to be the target of trial, whereby scanned image data is transmitted in the form of an attachment file of an e-mail.

23. The trial management system set forth in Claim 1, further comprising a security function as one of the functions to be the target of trial, whereby image data once printed out is erased.

24. A program which causes a computer to function as a control section in a trial management system, the trial management system including:

a storage section storing one or more functions to be a target of trial;

a trial instruction giving section for receiving a

user's instruction on a trial period for said function;

a specifying section for specifying a function, a trial of which is started, according to an instruction received by said trial instruction giving section; and

a control section for setting a trial period for the function specified by said specifying section in accordance with the instruction received by said trial instruction giving section.

25. A computer-readable recording medium, wherein recorded is a program for causing a computer to function as a control section in a trial management system, the trial management system including:

a storage section storing one or more functions to be a target of trial;

a trial instruction giving section for receiving a user's instruction on a trial period for said function;

a specifying section for specifying a function, a trial of which is started, according to an instruction received by said trial instruction giving section; and

a control section for setting a trial period for the function specified by said specifying section in accordance with the instruction received by said trial instruction giving section.